

Changing Times : UNCHANGING GOD

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Sermon Audio file

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We will Run and not grow Weary

As we (the elders) discussed and prayed about what we felt would be a good theme for this year we were struck by how big the changes have been in this last 12 months – the world will not be the same again – our lives will not be the same again.

Many people now work from home who never did before, and many organisations are planning to leave it that way. Our next door neighbour. Its been hard for most people.

Most of us are now used to having meetings in a virtual way – using online tools like zoom and microsoft teams, and what I find amazing is that it works well – something I would have been reticent to believe a year ago.

This year I have done a course in counselling and almost all of it was online – I was very doubtful about how it would work. But it did, and more than that I feel I have new friends that were on the course with me who I have only physically met a few times.

These are strange times, that challenge our ways of thinking, working, interacting – so many big changes

Its so good to know that GOD remains the same. He is unchanging

So that was how our theme came about Changing times, unchanging God.

I think that this is the part of the core of what it is to be Christian in this mad world we live in, because if God is unchanging he really can be the rock that we build our life on. He is the hope that is constant, and that is why our verse for the year is so apt.

“Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength” Isaiah 40 v31 it goes on to say they will soar on wings like eagles, they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint

I want some of that – don't you? I want to soar, I want to run ...

I know I grow weary and irritable and grumpy. I'm sad to say, in fact I have several mugs that my kids have bought me about being grumpy – here's one!

So where am I going with this? I want to change your worldview – explain.

I want to discuss why we grow weary,

I want to learn How we can live in the truth of this verse,

and I want us to be encouraged to keep going, to keep focused, or get focused.

Why we grow weary

What I find is that life tends to drag us down – It seems to have a never ending pressure. And yet God talks about Soaring like eagles – Jesus talks about his yolk is light

While I was preparing for this I re-read a book that David Holman recommended to me a few years ago. Its called Falling upward By Richard Rohr. Its all about how we have to fail, we have to fall in order to learn the lessons of life so that we can go upward. He says it takes most of the first half of our lives to do that – we become really productive and of worth in the second half of life if we have allowed the falls to teach us, so that we can rise like the eagle.

In it he talks about how when he was working with men as a counsellor and a spiritual director (this applies to all of us by the way, women as well) he found one of the first things had to get through to them was that life is hard. So many men he worked with had a world view that was just not realistic they seemed to think that everything would all work out, they didn't need to worry or work at it, and this world view just is not true. He had to help them re-frame their thinking. Once they got it they started to have some hope, and started to learn the lessons.

For many when we first become Christians we have a vitality an energy a life force, a hope that comes from our faith – its wonderful to see. Think back to when it was all new to you. It was probably a bit weird, but exciting, you probably saw God in everything, little things going right, God showing you the way forward. It is that strength of that hope that we now have in Jesus that just bubbles out of new Christians.

I remember first joining a new church in Blandford....

I was talking to Dave Enwright the other day about when we were praying about adoption and we were being asked to send a large amount of money (which we didn't have) to Cambodia to start the process over there. We prayed and fasted – it was really hard, do we trust these people? how do we find the money anyway if we do? We trusted God to provide the answers. 3 days later an envelope was given to the church with our name on it – it had £2000 in it – we took this as a yes answer and the rest as people say is history. That was at the start of our adoption journey we were so excited to be in Gods will and moving forward in things he was asking us to do. As the years went on we took risks for God and he was always there to support us. We had some nightmares too, but our hope and faith carried us through.

Somehow over time things drag us down, we don't see victory in the things we thought we would, Life hits us, people let us down, Christians let us down, loss takes the strength out of us.

God is not changing, God is still the same God that we were so enthusiastic about just a few years ago, but our enthusiasm has leaked way. Our hope seems to have got smaller.

When our hope is small and life throws its inevitable things at us we buckle under the pressure but when hope is large we seem to rise above it deal with it because we “know” (because of our hope) we are going to get through to the other side.

Dr Valerie Maholmes was part of a research team into people who grew up in poverty and yet managed to to have success later in life – this is a purely academic piece of research and has no religious bias or connection and yet they found that the most common factor between all these successful people was that they had Hope. She goes on to say that Hope involves planning, motivation and determination – without hope we humans do not achieve.

How much more should we who have hope in a God who is alive and caring and interested in every detail of our lives be able to rise above those day to day things.

I believe that there are several elements to this to why it is so hard. Richard Rohr brings us a view of life that is so counter cultural. He says that the first half of our lives is about learning to live in this world and in order to do that we have to try new things, push some boundaries, fail. Dust ourselves down and do it all again. Failing or falling is part of the human condition but our culture is all about winning, beating the other person being the top. There is a huge tension here. Richard Rohr would argue and I believe it to be true that we are called on a life journey that involves doing, and failing and learning from our mistakes and carrying on. I think God calls us all to that kind of life.

Also our culture is so risk averse that we are afraid to try that new thing and especially when this is reinforced by our experience. All we have to do is think about the legislation that has been a constant barrage for perhaps the last 30 years or so. Health and safety, risk management, safeguarding. And that's just the things that come immediately to my mind. All of these things good in their own right, but sadly as a by product push us into doing less, trying less - we end up doing nothing because we end up feeling it is too risky to do anything. The legislation is there to create safe boundaries to work in not to stop us doing new things, it is there to help us do the new things well. Unfortunately it doesn't feel like that.

Our culture and our world view have a huge impact on what we do, so what is the answer?

Well the trite answer is Romans 12v2 do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of the mind. It sounds to easy - not.

And that is what Richard Rohr is encouraging us to do. Get a godly perspective see life as a journey with seasons that come and go and come back again. When things get tough take a step back and focus on God, try to get his perspective, if you find that hard, talk it through with someone you trust, perhaps one of the leaders here.

If you can keep some perspective you can keep some hope.

We all struggle with the day to day I know I do. Often when we elders meet together we have a time to say what's going on in our lives - I blab out the frustrations that are going on in my life at the moment, there is usually a list!!! but I know and they know that tomorrow is a new day and while I might be frustrated today tomorrow will bring a different perspective and often a way through those frustrations, but we all need a place to let it all out - thank you guys for listening!!

Find a place you can let it all out. Its okay to have a rant at God - you might think that would be irreverant, or that he doesn't want to know, but

He knows your frustrations and anger.

He knows your loss and your hurt,

He knows you right down to those dark thoughts inside.

And yet he still loves us with an unconditional love that most of us are still yet to feel fully, if only we would let ourselves be the person he made us to be.

Richard Rohr encourages us to do just that. He says the first half of life is about learning who we were made to be, and the second half of life is walking out that in the confidence and sure knowledge that God is the rock we stand on, he walks with us, and guides us when we let him.

Rohr talks about how most of society don't ever get to the second half of their lives because they get stuck in the world view that winning and getting to the top is the end of the journey, and when they fail there is nothing left to stand on. That means that 99% of us are left feeling a failure and that life is pointless, because there is only one winner, one top slot - that can't be what God had in mind can it?

That thought is part of my testimony. At some point in my teenage years I came to the conclusion that this life was pointless. I was in the RAF at the time. You get up to eat some food go to work do lots of stuff that someone else wants done, come home eat some food, maybe blob in front of the TV or read or whatever you do to calm down after the frustrations of the day. Go to sleep and start it all again. I wasn't looking forward to that life.

So what did I do? I looked for some meaning to life. I studied all sorts of spiritual stuff, I looked into Tarot, I learned about Runes, I read books about Buddhism, I was searching for meaning - I soon found that in Jesus I found someone I could follow, someone I could look up to. His teachings are in my opinion the best way to live life and on top of that he is God. I just know that, I would say that I wasn't sure about that at first, but I am now - ask me sometime if you need help with that.

Have you read his gospels and really tried to understand what he has to teach us? Please if you've never done it read his gospels as a way of living life here on earth. It is why before we were known as Christians we were known as people of The Way.

So Jesus drew me to him with a message for life today and a message for the life after we cease to be on this earth. You see there has to be some point to it all otherwise why be here? don't you think?

I m going to try and bring all this together.

God is an unchanging God, its us that change and loose sight of him, our hope leaks away and we have to find ways to keep topping up. Coming to church is one way, but getting involved is even better.

There are seasons in our lives where God is close and its exciting and there are times when he doesn't seem so close. Its just a season and in all these seasons there are things to learn about ourselves and God. The main thing is not loosing the hope and faith that got us here. Its ok to question and worry about this, if you didn't you wouldn't be human.

The world says that we have to be winners, be top of our game whatever game we are in.

Jesus says the first will be last and the last will be first,

He says the meek will inherit the earth,

He says blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they will be filled - Fill us Lord

In fact the beatitudes from Matthew 5 that I quoted here are totally counter cultural and totally about what the kingdom of God is like. We cannot live up to the high bar that Jesus sets for our lives, but we can try, and we can be confident that when we fail God doesn't stop loving us. In fact I think he loves us more when when we dust ourselves off and set off again to follow him wherever he is taking us.

Don't you think its very freeing to live in a world view that says.

its okay to mess up,

its okay to stop for a while and grieve over loss.

its okay to prioritise people over doing and things.

Its okay not to be perfect.

Because that is the picture I get from the gospels.

And when we can live like that in the security and knowledge that God is truly for us and not against us, then we can soar like eagles we can run and not grow weary.

We just have to be the person we really are nothing more and nothing less.

Can we sing the Matt Redman song We could change the world.